MOTOR RACING / VINCE KOWALICK : No Strangers, Saugus Pair Again Cross Paths

By VINCE KOWALICK

AUGUST 29, 1992

No need to introduce Rick Crow to Richard Smith. They've met.

Last Saturday night, Crow and Smith stunned themselves and the crowd of 3,435 at Saugus Speedway with a heart-stopping, smoky collision during the final lap of the 15-lap Pro Stock figure-eight main event.

Crow and Smith collided at more than 60 m.p.h. in the track's intersection in what unquestionably is the worst figure-eight accident at the track this season and one of the worst of its kind in recent years.

Said Smith: "It was a chicken fight and we both lost."

The impact caused Crow's beat-up Chevrolet to roll slowly away from the intersection in the direction from which it came and left Crow unconscious for about a minute.

Smith remained conscious but suffered bruised ribs.

"I assumed he was going to go behind me," said Crow, 29, a nine-year track veteran from Canyon Country. "Next thing I know, my windshield is filling up with yellow paint. I didn't even know what happened until I got out of my car and looked at the scoreboard. Then I remembered seeing him out of the corner of my eye."

If the woozy Crow experienced *deja vu* , he probably was simply recalling the week before. Incredibly, Crow and Smith, a 33-year-old, three-year track veteran from Reseda, were involved in an almost identical, though less severe, figure-eight crash.

"Seems as if both our cars have a magnet drawing them together," Smith said.

Smith, who at the time was at the back of the pack and trying to rally, took the blame for last weekend's crash.

"I wasn't aiming for Rick or anything," Smith said. "I was just kind of in a bad mood and I went nuts and I wasn't going to stop. I said to myself, 'This is going to be an E-ticket ride, so hold on.' "

Maybe both drivers are to blame. In a psychological ploy, Crow admittedly warns competitors before the race that they had better be the driver to back down should they find themselves on a collision course with his front bumper.

"If someone's going to challenge me in the X, I'm going to hit them," Crow said.

Words to remember while being loaded horizontally into an ambulance.

Last weekend wasn't the first time Crow needed to have his head examined after a figure-eight race. After a crash in 1988, he was hospitalized overnight for observation. He suffered a mild concussion in last weekend's crash.

However, crashes come with the territory in figure-eight racing.

"There are two kinds of figure-eight drivers," Crow said. "Those who have been hit, and those who are going to be hit."

Add duelists: The crash put an end to Crow's season because of irreparable damage to his car. Crow is eighth in points.

Meanwhile, Smith, who is not among the top 10 in points, said he is working around the clock to repair his 1968 Chevrolet Chevelle in time for tonight's running of the Pro Stock division.

"I think I'm going to be paying more attention next time," Smith said.

Tour itinerary: The NASCAR Southwest Tour's next race is scheduled for Sept. 12 at Saugus Speedway, the second of two visits this season to Saugus. Ron Hornaday Jr. of Palmdale remains the tour's points leader after finishing second to Rick Carelli of Denver last weekend at Colorado National Speedway near Denver.

Miscellany: Two track records for qualifying were set last week at Saugus. Pat Mintey Jr. of Quartz Hill established a Sportsman division qualifying mark with a one-lap time of 16.37 seconds (73.30 m.p.h.). Ken Sapper of La Crescenta held the old record with a 16.41-second lap in June. Scott Dinger of Simi Valley set a Pro Stock qualifying mark of 18.17 seconds (66.04) to break the old record of 18.27 seconds (65.68) set by Brian Kelley of Arleta in April. . . .

Mike Kiedrowski of Acton has moved into the points lead of the American Motorcycle Assn. 500cc National Championship Series after two of five events.

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